

RADIO TRANSMUNDANE

Part Three

If you're already living
in a futuristic dystopian spy novel
why not be a covert operative?

As we exited to the street through the double doors of the community center, Al caught me looking a little perplexed. The look had been placed there by his suggestion that it was time to meet "the handler".

"The idea of a handler," he said, "seems to a lot of people to run against the Transmundane grain. I can see by the look on your face that you think so too."

"It sounds like a hierarchy. It sounds like Central," I replied, adding detail to the expression on my face.

"There's nothing inherently wrong in a hierarchy," Al assuaged. "The problem is when the hierarchy is built on coercion, threats, lies, and violence, when free will is artificially limited, when choice is purposefully preempted.

"I mean, there are problems with big voluntary hierarchies too, one of the reasons for the zentens, but those problems have more to do with agility and speed than anything else. They're structural problems. But if you choose to be part of a group that voluntarily follows a leader and operates in the spirit of Transmundane, I'm pretty sure no one in the org will fault you for it.

"The Taoists got it right in the yin-yang. Even the most extreme ends of an ideology have pieces of their other in them. We can't reject one to ignore the other. It's the interplay that gives rise to the ten thousand things."

I chose to forego asking for an explanation on that last bit; the main topic was far more important at the moment.

"So if I have this right, zentens can have a leader?" I pressed.

"As long as the group will accept one," he replied with a nod. "But that role will always be temporary. When a mission is complete and the need for a

leader passes, it'll be rejected by the rest of the group. It's in the nature of zentens, operatives, agents, Transmundane in general, to be leaderless.

"Basically, we assume full leadership over ourselves. That kind of power can be very addicting, hard to give up or share," he ended, chest heaving with stifled laughter.

"Okay, well, I'm confused now," I said, genuinely puzzled. "Transmundane has no hierarchy but it's an organization? Operatives have no leaders but they have handlers? I don't ... how could ... how does that even work?"

Stumbling over my words, I had the feeling like a carpet was about to be yanked out from under my feet.

If this seems a little anachronistic it's because at that time I hadn't met any other agents or operatives, hadn't undergone any training other than the bits and pieces I'd gleaned from the manuals, and aside from Al there wasn't really anything to indicate the presence of an "organization". It felt like I was being punked, and rather spectacularly.

"First off," started Al, "you need to know that profound doubt is a necessary part of the process, especially when you're dealing with something so covert and subtle. It's the *nigredo* phase of the alchemical allegory, The Dark Night of the Soul. The agent suddenly finds themselves in a metaphorical desert, bereft of the vitality that's been urging them along, any tangible evidence for their belief turned into vicious illusions and lies."

A little harsh maybe but yeah, I had some doubts.

"You're at the precipice now," he continued. "This is where the agent gets separated from the civvie, the agency man from the mundane one."

His final sentence was punctuated with a slow smirk, a challenge aimed squarely at me.

"You mean faith? I don't like how religious that sounds," I said, concerned.

"You believe that the door to your place will open when you turn the key, don't you?" he retorted with raised eyebrows.

"Well, yeah," I admitted, "but my faith is rewarded when I walk through the door."

"Exactly! It's no different here except that you haven't opened the door yet. The act of unlocking the door is the process of casting off of doubt. Once inside, it can be tossed into a corner like a pair of crusty undies because then you have it: the gnosis, the knowledge, the certainty that there's something behind the door. The presence of something beyond the entrance is no longer a belief, it's a fact. No religion required, dogma be damned. You want a banana? Don't pray for one, go grab it from that bowl over there," he pointed to the imaginary fruit bowl sitting on an imaginary table, an illustration meant to express the solid material reality of the phantom home.

Bananas as proof of existence. Got it. But what about the topic that we seemed to keep getting off of? I put it to him bluntly.

"The handler is really the ultimate Transmundane agent," he explained. "For some A-Os the handler is a he, to some a she, to others an it or a they. Maybe sounds, maybe lights, maybe a light caress, maybe a kick to the head.

"Philip K. Dick, the sci-fi writer, he was zapped by a pink flash and suddenly remembered that he was part of an ancient undercover organization fighting the Black Iron Prison, code name for Central. And he wasn't the only one to be thus 'enlightened'," he said, surrounding the word in air quotes.

"Handler's super undercover. Crazy covert. So much so that most communication is done synchronistically. Looks like natural phenomena to civvies but trained agents can pick up on the patterns, decode them.

"Tell me this," he continued, moving in closer and lowering his voice, "after we met did you start to notice any repeating coincidences? Any things that kept showing up again and again?"

It didn't take much effort to recall the relentless numeric patterns I'd been seeing everywhere. They'd started when I first encountered Transmundane and appeared steadily throughout each day, the latest just an hour earlier. I described them to Al.

"Marvelous!", he commented enthusiastically, instantly neglecting the hush-hush demeanour. "Yes, that's exactly the kind of thing I'm talking about. Communication in a language that you're particularly suited to receive, I presume?"

I wasn't sure what that meant.

"It means you're attuned to the language of numbers. You've probably been involved in something where numbers are used a lot. Am I right?"

Sure enough. I was heavily into a hobby where math is used to hide information, as numbers, in plain sight. Lots of people couldn't give a shit, many more would be bored to tears with the details, I happen to think it's neat. It's also where my views on "impossible" first started to shift.

"Okay, but what if I'm just seeing these patterns because now I'm looking for them? You know, if you look for something hard enough you start to see it everywhere, type of thing," I opined as if by proxy, paraphrasing a question I'd heard surprisingly often throughout my life.

"Those patterns must've existed in order for you to notice them," answered Al triumphantly. "Just because you didn't notice them before doesn't mean they didn't exist."

The point was valid. But I still felt like we were dancing around the main subject.

"I have to tell you right now that the concept of an organization seems to be at odds with everything that I know about Transmundane," I complained, feeling frustrated, "and I still don't really know what the handler actually *is* or how it fits into everything."

"Okay, so, an organization is broadly defined as a structured group of people with a shared purpose or mission, right?" he began.

I nodded. Sounded about right.

"Well, there's nothing in that definition that stipulates where that purpose has to come from, correct?"

I nodded again.

"So an organization like Transmundane whose members share a common goal, a collective unity of purpose, even if that purpose is broadly defined as completely individualistic or anarchic, fits into that definition, wouldn't you agree?" asked Al, head cocked to the side.

A unity of disunity. Got it. But there was still that other topic...

"I was trying to avoid telling you this outright," said Al sheepishly. "One of the manuals talks about it and does a way better job than I ever could. I didn't want to spoil it for you.

"For me it was such a," he paused, raising pursed hands to his temples and flicking open the fingers to indicate how blown his mind had been. "But since you're so persistent...

"The handler is the agent's mind. I don't mean their conscious mind, I mean the other one, the subconscious one. Well, you see," said Al with mild irritation, "I'm already saying it wrong.

"In the manual it's called the superconscious. It's a greater psyche which agents can access through training. Jung called it the collective unconscious, an archetypal mind that's separate yet simultaneously embedded within all human minds.

"The name subconscious tells your how its thought of in modern psychology. But Transmundane overstands, to borrow a West Indian term, that this nomenclature is upside-down, that the human mind is actually an appendage to the superconscious, like a finger on a hand, see? The org teaches agents to properly apprehend this, like opening that hand's third eye," he winked.

"The superconscious makes use of the physical world to communicate with the agent. Sometimes it simply draws the agent's attention to pre-existing symbols in the physical environment, to be perceived as synchronicities. Sometimes the superconscious subtly sets up conditions in the environment in order to send messages or provide material support, what we call synchronistic dead drops. Sometimes it's a little of both.

"This is how tactical thaumaturgy works too, or at least that's the going theory. This is also why the superconscious has such a wide variety of identities, why no two agents will describe it in the same way even though they can agree that it's the same thing. Some A-Os go so far as to say that the superconscious is a demiurge, maybe even the big guy himself. Or herself. Themselves. Itself. You get the idea.

"It's the model for the agency, the foundation, the source. Subtly covert modus operandi with overtures of espionage, heaping spoonfuls of mysticism, magick, spiritualism, and other 'spooky, sci-fi, undercover shit'," he said, once again employing air quotes.

"If that doesn't describe Transmundane, I don't know what does."

I sat there, silent, for I don't know how long, letting it all sink in.

Eventually I asked, "So my handler is the Subliminal, huh?"

Al nodded.

"Well shit," was all I had left to say.

Okay, cool. First mission: make contact with my handler. Only problem was, I had no idea how.

Rather than an intelligible message or set of instructions, the numeric patterns seemed like a sort of physical gesture, a way to get my attention. It was as if the Subliminal was waving at me from behind every digit, demanding a chat, and I was standing there like a dummy, shrugging my shoulders ignorantly and yelling back, "Sorry! Number's in the way! I don't know what you're saying!"

I'd need to establish a two-way communication but doing that would require knowledge of where to send the messages. And how.

As I would go about my day, the numbers would continue to appear, reminding me of the organization behind the scenes and my handler waiting for me to get my shit together so we could talk.

I tried recording them, then analyzing them every which way from Sunday for any non-obvious mathematical patterns. Came up bupkus every time.

I now realize, in exquisite irony, that I wasn't even able to add two plus two.

At that time I had already been digging into two manuals, Theoretical Symbology and Tactical Thaumaturgy. It never occurred to me that simply being engrossed in something adds to the *language* with which you can communicate.

In other words, my language was numbers but now as a result of the manuals I could also talk symbols, glyphs, sigils, and graphics. Nothing too fancy,

mind you; this was more like useful tourist phrases such as ordering another round of drinks or getting you to the nearest toilet.

Still, the simple act of focused reading instantly opens up another avenue by which an agent can communicate with the handler, other Transmundane agents, possibly civvies or even Central sympathizers.

In the most direct sense, being able to talk shop with someone about their favourite topic is a quick and casual way to get sympatico, get some info, maybe suss out friend or foe; a useful operational skill.

More importantly, the environment, which may include the agent's own body, can now be used for communications using the newest language. Kind of like maintaining secrecy by switching code books, except each new version adds to the vocabulary.

Learning is never wasted in the org.

Unfortunately, I wasn't yet at the basic addition stage. The symbol that had suddenly manifested in my environment hadn't registered the way it should've.

It was on billboards, on television in everything from shows to ads, on the sides of trucks, on books and magazine covers, on the sides of buildings as graffiti, in corporate logos, on product packaging, in pamphlets handed to me on the sidewalk, drawn idly on discarded gum wrappers and receipts lying in the street; in short, it was everywhere.

To me the image seemed complex enough that it shouldn't be *that* common, yet apparently it'd had babies and they were all clamoring for my attention.

It was hard not to notice the trend but for the sake of sanity I tried not to pay it much mind. Here was yet another thing I kept seeing repeated in the environment that suggested significance but revealed no meaning. Why did I

keep seeing these patterns and why did they add up to nothing? What was I supposed to do with them?

Then, suddenly, the proverbial ton of bricks dropped. How could I have been so blind?

Two.

Two.

Add.

Equals.

Fucking.

Four.

The answer had been staring me in the face nearly the entire time.

I specified a time frame of "SOONEST" on the completed requisition, hoping that it didn't come across as too pushy while still communicating my impatience.

Task completed, I waited.

Excerpt from "Transmundane Training Manual - Meet Your Oracle Buddy!":

"Nonlocality at the quantum level is a scientifically established fact.

For example, two entangled quantum particles, separated by arbitrary physical and even temporal distances, will share characteristics that can be detected and used to communicate information. This 'quantum radio' transmits information instantaneously, using principles that scientists can currently only guess at. Einstein really didn't like the whole idea, called it "spooky action at a distance". Unfortunately for him, it's a thing.

Even more interestingly, the particle measurements are said to be unresolved until they're observed. The act of observing them resolves them, causes their descriptive 'wave function' to collapse. It reopens the question of the sound of a tree falling when no one's around to hear it.

Our material reality does some mind-bending stuff.

Gravity and time are malleable too, and not just at the really really tiny level. General relativity has people aging at different rates, scientific fact, and there are places on earth where gravity isn't the same as elsewhere, also well researched.

I don't pretend to understand even a tenth of it, but the dumbed-down versions do seem to point to a broader existence, one hiding beneath and causing 'perturbations in the reality field', as Philip Kindred Dick described it. An existence not bound by causality, time, or space. One disguised as material determinism, an undercover reality, a genuinely transmundane one.

The word 'quantum' gets tossed around a lot, probably because it looks and sounds cool, but most of the time it's just a cheap gimmick. Using existing scientific literature on the topic as proof that psychic abilities are real is also a huge leap. An agent has to walk the fine line between being open to new ideas and seeing them for the bunk they are; this is a good example of where the line is drawn.

But when you push past the overgrowth of hokey, con, and misunderstood, you still arrive at an abundant meadow of sober information. There's no sign of 'Quantum Pineal Activation CrystalsTM' anywhere but the remaining evidence says that there's still more going on than meets any of the eyes.

Science has succeeded in revealing that material reality is fundamentally a mystery. All questions will not be answered and in many cases they only multiply. Science has also revealed that, with patience and training, the mystery can be harnessed, even if it's in ways that may sometimes be imperfect and not always well understood.

Tomorrow, science may have a better explanation with better practical potential when it comes to certain phenomena. Or maybe Thaumaturgy will prove to be more pragmatic, producing more effective methods. Should an Agent-Operative in the field be expected to limit themselves to either one just to satisfy some ideological dogma?

That's not the Transmundane way."

Excerpt from "Transmundane Training Manual - Meet Your Oracle Buddy!":

"Every Agent-Operative should avail themselves of *at least* one capable oracle.

The oracle is a hard line to the Agent-Operative's handler, a way to get instantaneous feedback, albeit in a limited format. It's typically used with a forward-feed link established in a meditative state, induced through binaural beats or if available, Neural Resonance Tech.

The Agent-Operative is encouraged to start out with any of the standard operational 'mancies': apantomancy, transataumancy, bibliomancy, oneiromancy, etc.

No method should be discarded outright but after efficacy, ease of deployment should be the next determining factor in the oracle's use as a standard operational asset.

For example, bibliomancy can be quite unwieldy in certain situations, especially if the Agent-Operative wants their handler to have a well-endowed phrasebook at their disposal. However, a relatively lightweight payload of a cherished book and possibly a reading lamp can make this an excellent method for most situations. The Agent-Operative should use situational discretion and explore one or two additional oracles as back-ups.

Generally speaking, environmental perturbations are covered by the duo of apantomancy and transataumancy (AT), and require only the Agent-Operative's own senses. This simple reason alone should place them at the top of any Agent-Operative's list of oracles to evaluate.

Oneiric oracles can be difficult to gauge due to their unpredictable and unfettered nature. This also makes them some of the most expressive and worth exploring. The oracular language tends to be very unique to the individual so any 'guide' or 'reference' on the subject should, at best, be considered a mild suggestion; one Agent's mellow swimming pool symbolism is another Operative's urine-filled splash pond.

Making a detailed record can help to decipher the oneiric communication in a post-analysis. The oracle can produce general feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction to assist in correcting the analysis but as with any language, it can take some time to learn. If this proves too onerous, there are always alternatives such as reading freshly-killed goat entrails."

Excerpt from "Transmundane Training Manual - Meet Your Oracle Buddy!":

"Higher security clearance can be gained by an Agent-Operative through cooperation with their handler. The oracle can be employed to secure initial lower-level access but beyond that their role becomes increasingly limited. This is not necessarily the case for the Agent-Operative or their handler.

Reliance on mundane oracles is therefore something to be reduced and eventually eliminated altogether. They're considered a crutch, something used by Agents and rookie Operatives.

Similarly, over time some Agents learn to associate symbols, sensations, smells, tastes, even internal thought triggers with the synchronized brainwave states of user-tuned binaural beats/NRT, a powerful technique.

For example, in the 'penetrating mind' state, more commonly referred to as the '360 feelies', Agent-Operatives can more readily assess the environment around them. It should be obvious why the ability to 'drop' into this state would be advantageous but it also commonly has the less obvious benefit of opening up a direct communication channel, a 'mind' or 'mental oracle', to an Agent's handler.

Some common baseline synchronized brainwave states that an Agent-Operative may find useful include: the over-clocked frequencies of a meditating master (e.g. a Shaolin shifu), the slow ionospheric Schumann frequency that carries living atmospheric signals all around the globe, the frequencies at the low end that are great for sleep or just chillin', the in-between ones that reduce pain or fatigue or hunger, and of course all the weird and unpleasant ones.

As with most Transmundane training, recording meaningful progress is key to discovering any technique or oracle's efficacy, and to unlocking their potential."

In the margin of one page, an underlined note scrawled vertically in a relaxed left-handed cursive reads:

"Spread Spectrum"

This is followed by some text in a smaller script:

"Start simple. You can always over-complicate things later!"

>EOM

NOTA BENE

**PARADIGMATIC TRAJECTORY SHIFT IMMINENT.
HYBRID DUAL-FREQUENCY[^] GENERATORS ENGAGED.
ADJUST PERCEPT COGNIZANCE SYSTEMS SOONEST.**

[^] somnus vigiliae

>SOM

>INTRA-MISSION: AUDACIOUS [STATUS ALERT]

>CODED WAVELENGTHS (M): 16~20, 42~114 [PARADOXICAL]

>BRIEF: INFILTRATE COMPANY XXXX TO GATHER LATEST INTELLIGENCE ON
PROJECT XXXX

>ASSIGNED A-O: XXXX

>STATUS: COMPLETE, INTEL GATHERED, POSSIBLE A-O EXPOSURE

>DEBRIEFING:

Ah yes, the drab-cloth-covered cubicles, high-traffic muted carpet, stale recycled air, low-hanging neon lights creating a perceptual wall that conceals a brutalist ceiling beyond. And of course lots of big, sealed windows to give the illusion of an open space, much like it might appear from inside a fish bowl.

I was familiar with it, had done it for years, down there with the other flunkies in the thick of the corporate weeds. After a while you just sort of become part of it, fusing with the drab partitions around you. It reminds you every day that you're just another egg in a beige carton, as disposable as any other come omelet time.

But you can break out. I'd broken out and had remained so until this mission. But this time I wasn't here as a numbered asset on the company ledger, I was the opposite, and it felt good.

I'd gotten past the various high-tech office security measures using the ever-reliable human points of failure and was now milling around, going over unoccupied desks, looking for "requisition forms" in case anyone asked.

No one did.

The place was a beehive of activity. Most of the staff were in small groups, furiously discussing solutions to topics that I was actively ignoring. Every circumstance seemed to have conspired to throw the place into gently organized chaos: the day, the time of day, the key people missing because some friendly stranger encouraged them to get wasted and/or fuck late into the previous night, the malware ravaging their systems...

After an extended period of rummaging, I popped my head up to take a breath and regroup. Maybe the information was somewhere less obvious.

That's when I noticed the office receptionist behind the desk at the end of the row of cubicles, watching me.

Judging by the sight line of the current row, she had probably been observing me for some time. I couldn't be sure what she'd seen but it wouldn't take much to put the pieces together. Normally this would be a bug out moment, except she was smiling coyly and doing her best to secretly invite me over.

I figured I should play this one out. The mission wasn't over yet.

I sidled up to her desk, doing my best confused-and-slightly-flustered imitation, being sure to mention those darned elusive requisition forms.

"Oh, requisition, huh?" she asked with a mischievous smile. "Okay" - she reached somewhere far behind her spacious desk and produced a streaked 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 - "here you go. Anything else I can help you with?"

After briefly glancing at the "INTER-OFFICE REQUISITIONS" form I looked up to meet her eyes.

She was sitting there at pert attention, broad smile and fierce focus communicating the burning pleasure of a woman linked to the object of her

desire by a shared illicit secret. Or possibly she was thinking of ways to fuck with me.

"No, that's fine, thank you," I answered. Maybe she bought my story, maybe she didn't care. Worked for me either way.

As I turned to go she suddenly said, "Wait a second! I have that other thing you were looking for."

"The other thing?"

"Yeah. You can get it from that woman in the yellow dress. The one standing over there talking to those people," she pointed to a small circle of people dressed in young upwardly-mobile managerial assistant attire, standing near a fire exit, cradling coffees, chatting calmly, oblivious to the commotion around them.

"They all work for the administration. She sits over there," the helpful receptionist said, pointing at a fancier desk two half-cubicles away from her own spot.

I didn't respond. Made no indication that I had any idea what she was talking about but, just in case it happened to coincide with my mission, I slowly and nonchalantly began to make my way over to yellow dress.

Once I got within earshot I started recording. Most of the conversation escaped me - I left Corporateville before becoming fluent in Bureaucraspeak - but yellow dress' contribution had all the right names and buzzwords. Fresh figures too. I know we still have to wait for analysis but I think we hit the jackpot there.

Anyway, as I went into look-busy-while-doing-nothing mode I gazed back briefly over my shoulder at the receptionist.

She waved, smiled, and winked.

So now I'm wondering, am I missing something here?

>EOM

>SOM
>INTRA-MISSION: PANOPTICUM [STATUS URGENT]
>CODED WAVELENGTHS (M): 16~20, 42~114 [PARADOXICAL]
>BRIEF: INSTALL COVERT SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT IN XXXX LABORATORY,
MONITOR FOR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY
>ASSIGNED A-O: XXXX
>STATUS: INCOMPLETE, FACILITY DESTROYED, SUSPECT MOLE
>DEBRIEFING:

My ticket in, and subsequently out again, had just rushed past through an intersecting hallway. I'd only caught a glimpse of the group as they ran by in the flickering neon lights, little blurs of black and white that occasionally resolved into the schulkleidung of frantically scrambling school children. I was supposed to hitch a ride out with them but then this happened. Pretty sure they'd be skipping the post-tour refreshments.

Everything else went according to plan. Paying that kid to be his "concerned father" on a cross-border school trip turned out to be one of my more budget-friendly bits of ingress brilliance but being annoying enough to have the guide insist on my absence from the remainder of the tour was the coup de grâce. Killed it, as they say.

But now they had sprinted past me and back toward the entrance, which was not according to plan.

Couldn't blame them though. The place was coming down hard and, really, who wants to be crushed under piles of jagged concrete next to a crumbling nuclear reactor? Not me, that's who.

Neither, I assumed, did the girl I had just been getting intimate with on the bearskin rug, hidden on the floor behind a rolling file cabinet, in a darkened hallway.

At first I thought that she was just some employee who got off on risky exhibitionist sex with naughty dads. I'd done what I'd come to do, her ID seemed legit, so I figured why not; it was bound to be better than the group tour. But before anything satisfying happened I suddenly found myself wondering why the fuck I was erect in the middle of Armageddon next to a half-naked woman on a dead bear.

It made me think there was something more to this than just your standard collapsing nuclear power plant.

I looked over at her, instantly confirming my suspicions. She was standing placidly, bear skin loosely covering her naked bits, a serene and imperious smile on her lips, black ice in her German-Korean eyes.

This had all been planned and she was in on it.

Seriously, a bear skin in a nuclear power plant? Granted I should've caught that one earlier but the main problem here is that the mission was a failure before it even began. The purpose of the whole thing was to monitor whatever unusual stuff had been reported at the lab and instead we were the ones being watched and set up.

Anyway, at that point I couldn't do anything but grab my clothes and, plunging arms and legs into any holes that seemed appropriate, run after the school group for the nearest exit.

I made it out just as the massive concrete slab over the outer doors collapsed behind me, then I scrambled up a nearby embankment to escape the billowing dust.

After watching the concrete cloud settle to a level I was comfortable with I ran back down to take a peek at a crack in one of the upright slabs. It opened into a mostly intact hallway that led directly to a section of the facility that I assumed was the reactor core.

I squeezed in but only made it a few meters before I spotted a team in radiation hazmat gear, well-armed and undoubtedly well prepared. I made the decision to observe and follow once they had extracted whatever it was they had come to get.

I backed up carefully and took a more covert position from which to surveil. It was at that time that I first noticed that I no longer had my wallet, mobile phone, or dignity.

>EOM

>SOM

>INTRA-MISSION: GLASS ELEVATOR [STATUS CRITICAL]

>CODED WAVELENGTHS (M): 16~20, 42~114 [PARADOXICAL]

>BRIEF: SITUATION VOLATILE, USE EXTREME CAUTION, RENDEZVOUS DOCKSIDE

07:00

>ASSIGNED A-O: XXXX

>STATUS: CONTACT ESTABLISHED

>DEBRIEFING:

So, yeah, that's how I made it to the double doors.

The kid with me had recently become an Agent. He had some parkour skills which I hoped would make up for his lack of Transmundane ones. I wasn't so sure if he'd have much chance to use them here but he was confident he could make it work. Not like we had many options anyway.

The plan was basically this: we'd start from our current position at the east entrance, work our way through the food court, up the escalator, through the gauntlet, then split up taking half-ish of the security force with me and half-ish with him.

He'd have a short but interesting run to a hiding spot near the glass elevator while I'd SSA my way west to the far end, create a diversion, then double-back to follow him to the rendezvous.

It wasn't a perfect plan, lots of holes and question marks, I know, but given the circumstances it was the best I could do.

The kid set out to immediately demonstrate his "ninja" skills by climbing a nearby pillar, taking advantage of the power cut to disappear into the shadows near the ceiling.

I only caught a glimpse of him as I was making my way up the western escalator over the coffee and ice cream hutches. There was some natural light there, dim but enough to allow me to see the latticework that the kid was using to get around. I'd like to see the technique being used to evade security instead of the nobody we had encountered so far, but I think he's got something useful there.

Anyway, he dropped down, pulled off the night vision goggles, we had a quick regroup, and then on the count of three we both sprinted like a bitch.

The security was young and dozy, didn't notice us until it was too late. As soon as they did, we started shrieking like lunatics and ran straight at them. Standard.

At the checkpoint, the kid bolted down a hallway toward the glass elevator while I kept running west.

The stunt bought us maybe three to four seconds, plenty of time for both of us to clear the area as security fumbled with their weapons. I was already down one of the service hallways before anyone had a chance to fire off a single shot. As long as the kid kept running I knew he'd make it with plenty of time to vanish. I'm assuming he did.

I crept through the service tunnels, mechanical rooms, and storage lockers, until I was able to get a peek at the western end of the mall. It was a fucking hornets' nest down there. If any one of us had come in that way, we'd be torn apart. No chance.

But I was behind the line and close enough to an ammunition locker to grab a grenade, pull out the pin, drop it back in, and run back without being spotted.

The explosion was bigger than I'd expected. To be honest, I didn't know what to expect but I didn't think that the blast would be, like, *seismic*.

Anyway, diversion created. From there it was easy to get to the glass elevator. I followed all security protocols; no tails, no eyes, not even a nose.

Then it was on to Dockside directly, straight through the vent work in the shaft, out through the locker and across the bridge, no pit stops or sightseeing.

The big door was opened, I walked through, and up there on the walkway is where you spotted me just a few moments ago. The rest is me telling you this and expressing a sincere hope that you have a Get-The-Fuck-Outta-Dodge plan.

>EOM